
4. Dimitris Kourkoulas, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Greek Presidency of the Council of the European Union

Among other innovations the *Treaty of Lisbon* in December 2007 laid the foundations for a new direction in democratic citizen participation in Europe. As set out in *Article 11, Paragraph 4 (TEU)* citizens are given a new right of initiative, that is, the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI), which enables one million EU citizens to call directly on the European Commission to propose legislation of interest to them in an area of EU competence.

Today, seven years later, it is clear that European Citizens' Initiatives are a success and are now a permanent feature of the European political landscape. For European policy makers and legislators it offers the opportunity to listen to the concerns which motivate citizens to make a call for action and respond with specific commitments. For European citizens it offers the opportunity to forge cross-border links by stimulating public debate on issues chosen by them.

None of this should come as a surprise: the ECI is a game changer in our efforts to build more robust and responsive democratic institutions. It gives citizens the same right as the Parliament and the Council to invite the Commission to launch a legislative process. In the process, the distance between EU institutions and citizens is effectively bridged and the extent of citizen participation in EU politics is dramatically increased.

Needless to say, the role of the ECI is not to replace the normal democratic process. Rather the aim is to supplement it by employing innovative tools available in our era. In this process we need to be careful not to undermine support for established democratic institutions and practices. European democracy will remain a representative democracy, not a plebiscitary one.

The pioneering efforts of the first ECI campaigns presented in this new publication "An ECI That Works!" are instructive. Learning from this diverse collection of campaigners, politicians, representatives of EU institutions and experts provides an excellent basis from which to reflect on this nascent institution.

Dimitris Kourkoulas is Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Hellenic Republic.

The text in this file is a part of the book:

AN ECI THAT WORKS!
Learning from the first two years of the European Citizens' Initiative

Edited by Carsten Berg and Janice Thomson

Prefaces by Maroš Šefčovič, Martin Schulz and Dimitris Kourkoulas

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This book contains contributions from 16 ECIs,
14 analytic and prospective contributions, and two interviews.

You may order the book by email: contact@citizens-initiative.eu

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